

## One Year Later – The Balance Sheet for the Iraq War

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**M**ore than a million people around the world marked the first anniversary of the US/UK invasion of Iraq this weekend with [large street demonstrations](#). Compared



with the [huge protests](#) before the war started, however, this was a much lower turnout. This is partly because mass protests obviously failed to prevent the invasion. It is also because many believe that even if war was wrong to begin



with, the US and the UK now have an obligation to the long-suffering Iraqi people to see that some kind of decent social order is established before they withdraw.

However, this by no means relieves the instigators of this precipitous venture of responsibility for what, in retrospect, appears to have been an **illegal, costly, poorly-managed, distracting, divisive, and entirely unnecessary engagement with the wrong enemy at the wrong time.**

While it may be decades before the consequences of the Iraq Invasion are completely clear, enough time has already passed for us to begin to take stock.

The following is the first year's balance sheet.

## CONSEQUENCES

1. **We have now almost satisfied everyone's curiosity about Saddam's WMDs. They have not existed for quite some time.** The US-led coalition's weapon inspectors have searched high and low. *Ellos no encontraron nada.* Of course the hawks still assure us that they will turn up eventually, and that we should now search for them in Syria....
2. For purposes of the next time around, **what we do now know for sure is that the CIA, MI-6, and the Mossad, as well as many of the hawkish senior Bush and Blair Administration officials and media pundits** who "sold" us the war, are **unreliable, careless with the truth, and trigger-happy.**

On the other hand, **the UN weapons inspectors, as well as "dovish" France, Russia, China, and Germany, were basically right all along.**

This is an invaluable lesson. We should now proceed to apply it in the upcoming elections in the US and the UK, as Spain has already done.



3. **We now know much more about where other countries got their WMDs.** In the last year, while the Iraq War was proceeding, we identified the true sources of the last three decade's WMD proliferations, thanks in part to Libya's decision to turn in its WMDs.

One key source turns out to have been our [ally Pakistan](#), in the case of North Korea, Iran, and Libya. In addition, as we've known for some time, the other key sources were our [ally Israel](#), plus the US and West Germany, in the case of nuclear weapons for South Africa and [India](#); and the US itself (plus Security Council members France, the UK, Germany, Russia, and China), in the case of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons capabilities. [Iran and Libya have reportedly agreed to cooperate with UN nuclear weapons inspectors.](#) **Israel and Pakistan, our close "non-Nato" allies, have refused to do so.**

Libya's concessions probably had little to do with the Iraq invasion per se, so we might well have learned all this without it. But at least we now know for sure that

*Saddam had nothing to do with WMD proliferation.* The real culprit was our own behavior and that of our self-seeking "allies."

Of course the other great irony here is that while we've been chasing phantom WMDs in Iraq, it appears to be Iran that is, next to Pakistan, the Islamic country with the most advanced nuclear weapons program. It is not obvious to many observers that the Iraq War has strengthened the US hand with respect to Iran -- indeed, with our hands so obviously full, and with Iraq's Shiites in such a strategic position, *it may well have reduced our leverage on Iran.*

**4. We now know all about Saddam's links with al-Qaeda and 9/11. They were non-existent.** [A majority of Americans apparently still believe that there were ties between Saddam and Al-Qaeda, and that Saddam was involved in 9/11](#), perhaps in part because the US President and Vice President persist in encouraging this *poppycock*. However, the best evidence – including the testimony just this week of [President Bush's own former top counterterrorism expert, Richard Clarke](#) - suggests that these beliefs are **completely without foundation**. Apparently the warmongers in the Bush Administration decided to punish Iraq, on top of Afghanistan, because, as Secretary Rumsfeld reportedly put it, Iraq "[had more targets to bomb.](#)"

Of course the warmongers have also argued that al-Qaeda might have links to many other countries, notably Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. As we evaluate these claims, we should remember the expensive lesson that we've just learned about al-Qaeda's purported links to Saddam.

**5. Saddam's ruthless Ba'athists have finally been removed from power.**

In this respect, at least, the war helps to make up for the fact that the US played a major role in bringing the Ba'athists to power back in the 1960s, the assistance that the US, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait (as well as Russia, the UK, Germany, etc.) provided to Saddam throughout the 1980s, and the Allied coalition's **failure to remove him from power in 1991, at a cost of several hundred thousand Shi'ite lives.**



In addition to Saddam's removal, some of the war's supporters have concluded that the Iraqi people have already been "liberated." This is a huge overstatement -- as if, simply by Saddam's demise, Iraq had already become a peace-loving constitutional democracy with Swiss-like cantons. One can almost smell the Alpine air.

Those Iraqis who have survived the war do now enjoy many new freedoms. Almost as many Iraqis are now employed, with access to electricity, running water, and health care, as before the invasion. They are free to look for work, to start companies, to open bank accounts, to read about their troubles in the media and the mail, and to shop. Except for the fact that more than a quarter of them are still unemployed, are finding it very hard to make ends meet from one day to the next, and fear for their lives because of the security situation, all this is wonderful.

By June 30, they will also presumably be allowed to vote for the "local councils" that the US is setting up all over the country, although these appear to have carefully-vetted candidates. Actual elections for national leaders is a long way off, and the fundamental question of the balance of power among this somewhat artificial "nation's" Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish communities remains unresolved.

Nor is it helpful that the US has permitted the return and empowerment of émigré parasites like "Iraqi National Congress" émigré leader [Ahmed Chalabi](#), a well-spoken con artist who was convicted of bank fraud in Jordan in 1992, and sentenced to 22 years at hard labor, is reportedly wanted on similar charges in Lebanon, and whose



well-armed minions now hold forth at the Baghdad Hunt Club.

Looking forward to the day when the 100,000-man US-led coalition army leaves, it is also a concern that, just as in Haiti, the US saw fit to completely abolish the Army. Let's all hope that Iraq's new US-trained Police Force does a better job defending democracy than the US-trained Police Force did in Haiti. Former Haitian President Aristide, now in Jamaica, may be available for consultations on this point, having just been overthrown by a tiny force of only two hundred armed irregulars while his "Police" took to the hills.

**All this only leaves about a dozen or so other brutal regimes in the Middle East left to go.** Unfortunately, their ranks include such leading US allies like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Kuwait, Dubai, Djibouti, and Pakistan, as well as Syria. They

have all been watching the progress of our experiment with “democracy” closely, and they are reportedly not that impressed.

**6. Whether or not Iraq was a haven for terrorists before the war, it has clearly become one now.** The destruction of Iraq’s Army, its wide-open new borders, and the opportunity that it presents to hunt US and UK troops has attracted new “terrorists” by the hundreds.

Some argue, painting lipstick on the pig, that this is actually a good thing, since we now have all these enemies in one place. This view is rooted in the assumption that there are only a finite number of terrorists in the world, and that if they were not in Iraq, they would just be operating somewhere else. In fact, it is more likely that many of those who have come to Iraq are new recruits, appalled by the US occupation of an Arab country, and persuaded that we are there to fight Islam and seize Iraqi’s oil.

Of course some of the war’s proponents don’t really care which of these views of the “terrorists” is correct. They were primarily interested in seeing the US sucked in....errr, persuaded...to establish its own long-term military base in the center of the Middle East, take sides in the interminable battle against the evil Muslim/ Arab hoard.....err, “terrorists,” sorry, and contribute most of the fighting, dying, and finance.

**7. The Iraq War has not done much to halt terrorism outside Iraq, either.** While the US has been fortunate enough to avoid another 9/11, the last year has seen a significant increase in global terrorism elsewhere, with countries like Spain, Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia, France, the UK, Germany, Pakistan, and Russia getting used to a whole new level of permanent insecurity – somewhere between “code amber” and “code red.”



Overall, the Iraq War appears to have indeed distracted attention and resources from the war on terrorism, inflamed world sentiment, and created armies of new recruits for terrorist organizations. This is having serious economic as well as political consequences, with the “terrorism risk premium” built into world stock markets now at its highest point since September 2001.

In short, from the standpoint of fighting terrorism, launching the Iraq War was really a **pretty dumb thing** to do.

**8. Afghanistan and Pakistan are increasingly bogged down with the terrorist struggle, and the Iraq War has certainly not helped.**

Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, the Karzai Government, and Pakistan's President Musharraf appear to be locked in a stalemate. Of course, Bin Laden and al-Qaeda's other top leaders are now "surrounded," but this just means that they are somewhere within a tiny, narrow 20,000-square-mile region in Northwest Pakistan. Meanwhile, Pakistan's General Musharraf and Afghanistan's Hamid Karzai really are confined to about 100 square miles around Islamabad and Kabul, where they have each both narrowly survived two assassination attempts in the last six months.



Just this week, Karzai lost his [second Minister of Aviation](#) in a year to assassination, not by "terrorists," but by a local warlord. His government will try to hold elections this summer, but it is only likely to include about 10-15 percent of the country's potential registered voters. Elsewhere the warlords are too busy growing opium and producing heroin base to pay much attention to Karzai's central government, which - - compared with Iraq -- has received relatively limited funding from its foreign allies and the UN. Afghanistan has reverted to its pre-Taliban levels of opium production, accounting for more than 90 percent of the world's supply, with Karzai warning that the country is becoming a "[narco-state](#)."

Meanwhile, after two years in hiding, the Taliban is also [staging a comeback in several parts of the country](#). This is partly because the Bush Administration decided to use so few US troops in the first attacks on Afghanistan that many of the Taliban and al-Qaeda were able to escape over the border to Pakistan. It is also because the locals are tiring of the warlords.

**9. The "Middle East peace process" has, quite literally, run into a "Wall."** The Bush Administration, preoccupied with the War and an election, has paid scant attention to implementing its "road map," and the Israeli-Palestinian relationship has basically defaulted to a perpetual state of war. Whether or not [the World Court declares Sharon's](#)



["Apartheid Wall"](#) illegal, without US involvement, this situation is not likely to improve. Indeed, the tendency will be for the extremists on both sides to escalate the violence– as evidenced by today's Israeli assassination of [\\_ Hamas' top leader.](#) Without the Iraq War to distract US leaders from this root cause of global terrorism, this escalation might have been avoided.

**10. Our friends and allies around the world have developed a much more hostile attitude toward the US.** This bears a striking resemblance to the world's attitude toward Israel, South Africa in the 1980s, and the UK and France during the 1956 Suez Crisis. Of course we are used to some disdain from the French. But only just last week, the new Prime Minister of Spain, a close NATO ally, was strikingly critical of the US, as were the South Koreans, another long-time US ally, and the Poles. We may be down to Britain's Tony Blair, at least until summer's UK elections. The next time around, in say Iran or Syria, the "coalition of the willing" would probably not have any NATO members in it. Of course we can always count on the Moroccans to lend us the 2000 mine-detecting monkeys that they provided for the Iraq invasion.

**11. The Iraq War may at least have enhanced the UN's credibility.** Even though the UN proved powerless to prevent the US from launching this grossly illegal "preventive war," in hindsight, the Security Council's methodical approach to the elimination of Iraq's WMDs has been vindicated. Indeed, the UN is now being begged by the US to come back to Iraq, pick up the pieces, and lend the US the credibility that it needs to get others to share the bill.

Beyond that, people are beginning to suggest that if only the US allies Pakistan and Israel would open their doors to UN weapons inspectors, the whole region might be made WMD-free some day soon.

**12. Iraqi oil production has been restored to [more than 2 million barrels per day.](#)** Of course "it was not about the oil." But Iraq's oil exports are now slightly higher than they were before the invasion, with another 1 million bpd not far off. This is important, given all the turbulence in Venezuela and recent terrorist events in Europe. Global oil prices are now much higher than they were before the war, and without Iraq's additional expected production, they might go much higher.

Whether Saddam's Iraq might have achieved these export levels without the war is doubtful, given the likelihood that sanctions against him would have remained in place. So at least we have one more definite entry in the war's "plus" column. Of

course the war was also very lucrative for US oil service companies like Halliburton. But once again ("repeat after me"): it was not about the oil.

**13. The price tag for all this has been high.** In human terms, at least 5-6000 Iraqi soldiers and 9-10,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed so far, with hundreds more joining them every month, plus thousands more who have been severely wounded. Many of the country's antiquities have also been liberated. As of March 20, 2004, there have also been 679 (687 by 3/23) combat fatalities and 3300 (3343 by 3/23) combat wounded for the US-led coalition, plus 7-8000 "non-combat injuries or sickness that required evacuation from Iraq." Before we are able to withdraw, there will probably also be at least another thousand Allied war dead, 2-3000 more Allied casualties, and many thousands more Iraqi casualties, as "Iraqi-mization" shifts the body count to our local allies. (Of course we "no longer do body counts.") While this is relatively small, compared with, say, the Vietnam War, it is almost certainly many more than the US military expected.

In financial terms, the Iraq War has cost about **\$165 billion so far**. The expectation is that the price tag will probably be another **\$40-50 billion per year** as 100,000 US troops are required – e.g., at least another 2 years. At this rate, the War's total cost -- not counting the cost of addressing any terrorism outside Iraq that it might ignite -- will easily be **at least ten times the entire First World foreign aid budget** for all low-income developing countries. For those who might prefer to spend the money at home, it is also many times the sum that the US Government is now devoting to "homeland security."

Of course these are only rough estimates. By 2007 or so, when the US finally transfers responsibility to the New Iraqi Police Force/ Army, and brings its troops home from Saigon...err, Baghdad, all these costs will be much clearer, especially to the thousands of families all sides that have had to pay the ultimate price for the privilege of being on the front lines of this brave new experiment with preemption.

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